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RECORD OF CONVERSATION AT BRITISH VILLA, 10 RUE SENEBIER

5 p.m. - 7 p.m., May 29, 1959

Recategorized as  
Category "A"

/s/ Warren A. Henderson

Present:

United States

Secretary Herter  
Secretary McElroy  
Mr. Merchant

U.S.S.R.

Mr. Gromyko  
Mr. Zorin  
Mr. Malik

France

M. Couve de Murville  
M. Lucet  
M. Laloy

United Kingdom

Mr. Selwyn Lloyd  
Sir Anthony Rumbold  
Mr. Hancock

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Mr. Herter raised the question of the procedure which the Foreign Ministers should follow in their future conversations. He suggested that they should decide the relationship between private talks and talks in Plenary Session.

Mr. Lloyd said that in his view the present discussion should be regarded as a continuation of the earlier discussion in the aircraft. As to future procedure, the Foreign Ministers should decide from time to time what suited them best. They should make procedure their servant.

Mr. Gromyko said that he would like a Plenary meeting on the following day, May 30. He wished to make a statement on Berlin replying to Mr. Herter's statement on the same subject. The other Foreign Ministers were having dinner with him that night and private conversations could then be pursued. Mr. Gromyko thought that all methods and procedures should remain open. The Foreign Ministers could decide upon what suited them best at any particular time.

It was agreed that there should be a Plenary Session on May 30 and that further plans should be made at Mr. Gromyko's dinner that evening. It was further agreed that no statements should be made to the press about private meetings, except by agreement between the Foreign Ministers.

Mr. Herter

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Mr. Herter then summarised the conversations which had taken place in the aircraft. Mr. Gromyko had expressed concern about the abnormal situation in Berlin. He had said that it was necessary to normalise the situation by ending the occupation regime. The status of West Berlin could be safeguarded. The Soviet Government had no wish to change the social order of West Berlin. It was willing to give guarantees on access, the economic life of West Berlin, etc. The D.D.R. would give similar guarantees either as a signatory to whatever agreement was reached or by making a separate declaration or declarations. It would also be possible for the United Nations to take part in such guarantees. Exactly how this could be done was a matter for discussion.

As to the Western troops in West Berlin, the Western Foreign Ministers regarded them as symbolic of the protection of the West Berliners. All four Foreign Ministers had agreed that these troops were not of military significance.

As to the occupation rights of the Western Powers in respect of Berlin, Mr. Gromyko had admitted that they existed. But he contended that they should be replaced by a new contractual agreement. The Western Foreign Ministers, on the other hand, had made it clear that they regarded these rights as inalienable. Mr. Gromyko had rejected the idea that West and East Berlin were on the same footing. He had said that East Berlin was the capital of the D.D.R. He had, however, maintained that the Federal Republic was not entitled to the same rights in Berlin as those which in his view the D.D.R. enjoyed in East Berlin. Mr. Gromyko had said that a symbolic number of Soviet troops could be stationed in West Berlin. But he had not agreed that the arrangements for stationing troops of the Four Powers could be put upon an all-Berlin basis.

M. Couve de Murville said that, since it was the Soviet Government who had raised the Berlin question in its present form, it would be appropriate for Mr. Gromyko to explain his views. If the Foreign Ministers were to make progress on the Berlin question, they should continue to discuss it privately. The Western Foreign Ministers were ready for such discussions.

M. Couve de Murville thought that discussion might proceed on the following basis:

- (a) The Soviet Government had expressed anxiety about the abnormal situation in Berlin which, it said, might give rise to incidents. The Western Foreign Ministers were ready to discuss what could be done to remove the possibility of such incidents taking place.

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(b) Mr. Gromyko

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- (b) Mr. Gromyko must accept the fact, arising out of historical events, that the Western Powers had a special juridical position in Berlin. This position could only be altered by German reunification and the conclusion of a German Peace Treaty, events which might be some distance away in the future. It must be understood that the Western position in these matters was absolutely firm.

Mr. Lloyd said that Mr. Gromyko had based his argument for altering the status of West Berlin upon four points:

- (a) the geographical situation of Berlin;
- (b) the abnormality of the continued occupation of Berlin;
- (c) the danger of incidents;
- (d) "subversive" activities, etc.

The facts of geography could not be altered. But points (b), (c) and (d) presented material for discussion. As regards the danger of incidents, Mr. Lloyd thought that it was reduced by the presence of Western troops. As he saw it, the crux of the Soviet position was the argument that the lapse of time had made the occupation of Berlin obsolete. This was not of course the view of the Western Powers, who could not accept that any one of the Four Powers could terminate Four Power agreements by unilateral action. This difference of view did not, however, mean that it was not possible or desirable to seek a modus vivendi or an interim solution pending German reunification.

Any unilateral denunciation of the Four Power agreements would strike at the basis of the confidence between the Great Powers and remove the possibility of lessening tension between them. The question at issue was how to take the heat out of the Berlin problem without striking such a blow at confidence and thus to make interim arrangements conducive to peace and security.

Mr. Gromyko said that the Soviet Government was not proposing to take unilateral action. It had submitted its proposals for discussion. Otherwise he would not be at the Geneva Conference. The Soviet Government desired to reach agreement with the other Three Powers. Nevertheless, if no such agreement could be reached, the Soviet Government would be obliged to cease exercising certain of its functions in Germany, which would then certainly be taken over by the D.D.R.

Mr. Selwyn Lloyd

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Mr. Selwyn Lloyd suggested that certain objectives were common to all four Governments, namely:

- (a) the West Berliners should have the social order which they themselves preferred;
- (b) there should be free access to West Berlin both for persons and for goods.

Mr. Gromyko indicated agreement.

Mr. Lloyd said that the question was how these objectives could be secured. The Western Governments said that only the presence of Western troops in Berlin could maintain the freedom and confidence of the Berliners. The Soviet Government had said that the Western troops should be joined by Soviet troops in West Berlin. Mr. Lloyd did not see the point of this proposal. Its logical counterpart would be the presence of Western troops in East Berlin. If, as he understood, Mr. Gromyko considered that the presence of Western troops in West Berlin was symbolic, why did he object to them being there?

Mr. Gromyko said that he had explained in the aircraft what his views were on this question of the status of East Berlin. He had nothing to add.

Mr. Herter said that the presence of Soviet troops in East Berlin was symbolic, just as the presence of Western troops in West Berlin was symbolic. If the Soviet Government chose to withdraw their troops from East Berlin, there was no way of stopping them, but such a withdrawal would not alter the status of East Berlin.

Mr. Lloyd drew attention to the presence in Berlin of Four Power organs, e.g. Spandau and the Air Control Centre.

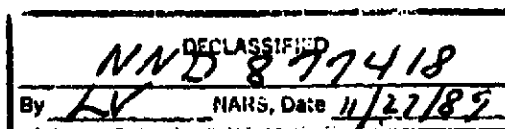
M. Couve de Murville asked what arguments Mr. Gromyko adduced in favour of his suggestion that Soviet troops might join Western troops in West Berlin.

Mr. Gromyko said that this proposal was intended to be a compromise. But the best solution in the view of the Soviet Government would be the complete withdrawal of all Western troops from West Berlin and the creation of a free and demilitarised city of West Berlin.

M. Couve de Murville argued that West Berlin was in practice already demilitarised. The United States, French and United Kingdom garrisons in West Berlin were small and symbolic. The Western Governments were prepared to say that these garrisons were not there for

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military purposes. There were no German forces in West Berlin. The city was governed by a German administration. The practical effect was that West Berlin was a free and neutral city. Did not these arrangements meet Mr. Gromyko's point?

Mr. Gromyko asked why, if this was the situation, it was necessary for the Western troops to keep any troops at all in West Berlin.

M. Couve de Murville said that one reason why the Western Powers kept troops in West Berlin was because they had the undoubted right to do so.

Mr. Lloyd said that the Western Powers kept troops in the city because it preserved the confidence of the West Berliners and the maintenance of the way of life which they had freely chosen.

Mr. Gromyko said that so long as Western troops were kept in West Berlin, the occupation was continued. The strength of Western troops was irrelevant. Would not the Western Powers agree to replace their troops by neutral troops?

M. Couve de Murville asked whether, according to Mr. Gromyko's reasons, even the presence of neutral troops would not constitute occupation. There was no question of Western troops interfering in the political life of West Berlin.

Mr. Gromyko said that the mere presence of Western troops constituted such interference.

M. Couve de Murville asked whether Mr. Gromyko thought that, if Western troops were removed from West Berlin, the present regime and social order in West Berlin would change. He also asked whether it was Mr. Gromyko's intention to suggest that a "free city" of West Berlin should be created by agreement between the Soviet Government and the three Western Governments.

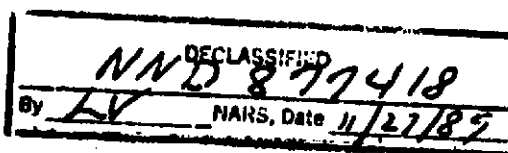
Mr. Gromyko confirmed that that was his intention. There were, however, different forms which such an agreement could take.

M. Couve de Murville said that he considered that West Berlin already enjoyed guarantees from the Four Powers under the Quadripartite Agreements. At any rate, such guarantees continued to operate unless the Agreements were unilaterally denounced.

Mr. Herter said that the West Berliners were a free people. They had indicated by a free vote that they wished to preserve the symbolic presence of Western troops in West Berlin. The inconsistency in the Soviet position was the Soviet Government's denial of a similar

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choice to the East Berliners. The mere fact of this denial was a source of anxiety to the West Berliners.

Turning to the question of access to Berlin, Mr. Herter said that the Western Governments had accepted in good faith Mr. Gromyko's statement about the willingness of the Soviet Government to give guarantees on this subject.

M. Couve de Murville said that there was free access to West Berlin at present. It was therefore a question of how to maintain what already existed.

Mr. Gromyko agreed, but said that it was a question of working out the necessary guarantees. An agreement could be reached between the Four Powers for jointly guaranteeing access. The D.D.R. could be associated with such an agreement in an appropriate form.

Mr. Herter asked what would happen if the D.D.R. officials interfered with free access in any way.

Mr. Gromyko said that, in that case, it would be the joint responsibility of the Four Powers to restore the situation.

Summing up the conversation, M. Couve de Murville said that there were three main points of difference between the Soviet Government and the Western Governments:

- (a) the continuance of the occupation status;
- (b) the Soviet suggestion for stationing of troops in West Berlin;
- (c) the Soviet proposal for the creation of a "free city".

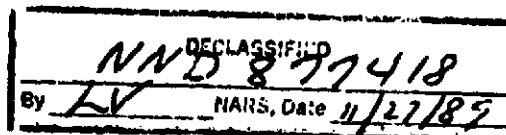
Mr. Herter raised the question of East Berlin.

Mr. Gromyko said that East Berlin was part of the D.D.R. There was no occupation regime there.

Mr. Herter said that an occupation regime existed in East Berlin even if the Soviet Government did not choose to exercise its occupation functions. He asked whether it was not a fact that, when the Soviet Union had made an agreement with the D.D.R., that agreement had provided for a different status for East Berlin. He did not see why it was necessary for the D.D.R. to have their capital in East Berlin. Why could they not choose Dresden or Leipzig?

Mr. Gromyko

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Mr. Gromyko said that the D.D.R. had exercised its sovereign right to choose its own capital and had chosen East Berlin.

M. Couve de Murville said that the Soviet proposal for a "free city" was a proposal for making West Berlin an independent state. Was it the intention of the Soviet Government to create an East German state? If so, this was a concept which the Western Powers must reject.

Mr. Gromyko said that it was not a question of creating a third state. It was a question of interference or non-interference. When he spoke of the independence of a free city of West Berlin, what he meant was non-interference.

Mr. Lloyd asked whether there were any aspects of the relationship between the Federal Republic and West Berlin to which the Soviet Government objected. For instance, did Mr. Gromyko object to West Berlin being in the same currency area as the Federal Republic?

Mr. Gromyko said that he did not object to that. But he repeated that there should be no interference with West Berlin. He equated both the presence of Western troops and the continuance of the occupation regime with interference. If the Western Powers wished to have guarantees in respect of West Berlin, for instance as regards access, it was open to them to make suggestions.

Mr. Herter said that he thought it would be valuable if suggestions on this subject could be put down in writing as a basis for discussion.

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